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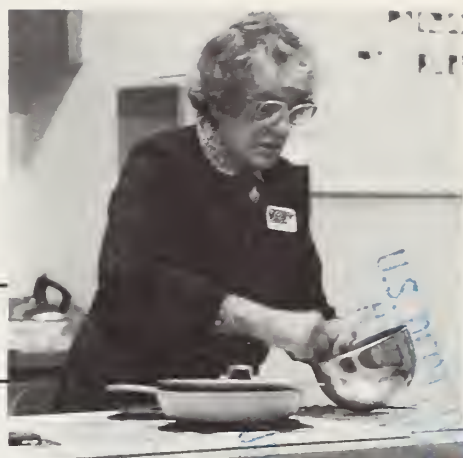
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# Food & Nutrition

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In this issue, we take a look at some of the ways people are providing nutrition education to families, elderly and disabled persons, and special groups, like Southeast Asian refugees.

While the approaches vary from personalized instruction to creative use of television and printed materials, the goal is the same—to help those on limited budgets develop the skills they need to plan, shop for, and prepare nourishing well-balanced meals.



# Gray Panthers Reach Out To the Elderly and Disabled

Tofu and mushrooms stir-fry, five-spice chicken, and zucchini and cheese soup—all these sound exotic and, maybe, a little expensive. But the San Francisco Gray Panthers are teaching seniors and disabled people that they can prepare meals like these easily and cheaply.

The Gray Panthers is a national organization working for better health care and nutrition, affordable housing, and accessible transportation for senior citizens and low-income people of all ages. "Age and youth in action" is their motto, and their members include everyone from teenagers to retirees.

Several times a month members of San Francisco's Gray Panthers venture out into senior centers, low-cost hotels, and housing projects to provide 1-hour cooking demonstrations featuring several items in the Panthers' large repertoire of recipes.

"My husband calls me the Julia Child of the Tenderloin," laughs Lynn Fitzwater, describing her demonstrations that often take place in San Francisco's Tenderloin, a skid-row area where many low-income seniors live. While the demonstrations are primarily aimed at seniors, the Gray Panthers periodically make presentations before disabled groups as well.

## Geared to elderly on low incomes

The program, called "Cheap and Nutritious," began when members of the Gray Panthers realized that many San Francisco seniors needed a different type of cooking class than was being offered.

"Too many of the cooking classes in the Bay Area were aimed at the affluent," says Miriam Blaustein, one of the co-directors of the program. "We want to show seniors that good food can be both cheap and fun. The idea was to present a program on hotplate cooking since so many seniors live in meager housing that doesn't have adequate cooking facilities."

Most of the meals that are prepared in the demonstrations are very simple and require just one pot or pan for preparation. The five-spice

chicken, for instance, is a tasty dish based on Vietnamese cooking that is easily made in one pan. Several of the other dishes, such as curried fish salad or the popular Middle Eastern dish, tabbouleh, do not even require a stove.

"Certain recipes seem to work better than others," says Blaustein. "Omelettes are especially good. They are very easy to prepare, few of the ingredients need refrigeration, and there are few leftovers. Our soup recipes are very successful also, especially if the seniors have a place to store the leftovers."

## Focus is on special needs

The purpose of "Cheap and Nutritious" is much more than teaching seniors how to prepare one-pan dinners. The Panther cooks try to tailor each demonstration to the special nutrition needs and problems of older people.

"We emphasize recipes that are low in salt, fat, and sugar—especially low in salt," explains Fitzwater, who is the other co-director of the "Cheap and Nutritious" project. "That's not to say we don't use *any* salt, but we try to make the seniors aware of how much salt is already in their foods. We have to do this because so many seniors are on sodium-restricted diets."

Throughout their presentations, the Panther cooks pepper their dialogue with information on which prepared foods contain the most salt and how seniors can reduce the amount of salt they eat. For instance, the Panthers suggest that when they feel like salting their food, they reach instead for an allspice mixture. The Panthers hand out a recipe for this mixture at their demonstrations.

The Panthers also emphasize using fresh food whenever possible. "We take the point of view that fresh is always better," says Blaustein. "With fresh foods, you have control of your meal and how much salt is added."

"We often tell the audience never to buy anything with ingredients they cannot pronounce," adds Lynn Fitzwater. "That type of joke makes

a point but it also helps loosen up the audience and makes them more receptive to our presentation."

The demonstrations themselves have a decidedly non-high-tech look. "We don't come in with shiny new equipment," says Blaustein. "We use stuff everyone has. A black cast-iron skillet, everyone recognizes that. Why, my eggbeater is older than I am."

While the Panthers do not directly discuss food assistance programs like food stamps, they do gear their recipe planning toward those on very tight budgets. They estimate most of the meals they demonstrate can be prepared for an average price of 50 to 75 cents per serving.

## Social isolation is a big concern

One of the cornerstones of the Panthers' cooking demonstrations is the social aspect of cooking and eating for seniors. Social isolation is a serious problem for low-income elderly. The Gray Panthers see their "Cheap and Nutritious" project as a way of combatting that isolation.

"We always tell our audiences at the demonstrations, 'Never eat alone,'" says Blaustein. "We tell them to call their neighbors across the hall—cook together, eat together. It can be very stressful to eat alone. The conviviality of eating with people, the interchange with neighbors is so important."

The "Cheap and Nutritious" project has been in operation for 3 years and has a staff of five. In addition to coordinators Blaustein and Fitzwater, the staff includes Florence Phillips, Lillian Kaskaddon, and Ann MacMillan. None are professional nutritionists, but are what they call "common sense cooks."

Each demonstration features three people. Two act as the cooks, and the third is an assistant. That assistant becomes especially important toward the end of the demonstration when a sample of the food is given to every member of the audience. While the sample is usually small, it gives the seniors an idea of how each dish should taste.

## Project helped by private funds

For almost the entire 3 years the project has been in operation, it has been funded by the McKesson Foundation, formerly the Foremost-McKesson Corporation. The funding enables the Gray Panthers to buy



supplies and print the recipes that are handed out to the audience.

According to Dena Goldberg, an official of the McKesson Foundation, the idea of offering support to the Gray Panthers' cooking project grew out of a survey of McKesson employees.

"In 1979, Foremost-McKesson surveyed its employees to see what type of groups they wanted the Foundation to fund," she says. "Employees showed a great interest in helping senior citizens. This survey had an impact on where the Foundation set its funding priorities."

Foundation representatives visited several of the demonstrations before authorizing funding, and they were impressed. "The program fit our needs very well since it cut across several of our priority lines," says Goldberg. "It served seniors and it dealt with nutrition issues." (At that time, Foremost-McKesson was involved in several aspects of food processing.)

"We were real impressed with the program," she adds. "The seniors really liked it, and it was more than a class on how to cook. It also had a socializing function—it was a place for people to meet."

Currently, the Gray Panthers are planning no major changes in the program. They do have a cookbook in the works, however, and hope to have it off the press later this year. For more information on the "Cheap and Nutritious" project, contact Miriam Blaustein or Lynn Fitzwater. Their address is:  
Gray Panthers of San Francisco  
50 Fell Street  
San Francisco, California 94102

*article and photos by Phil Canuto*



Miriam Blaustein (below), one of the co-directors of the "Cheap and Nutritious" project, prepares an omelette for an interested audience. At the end of the demonstration, every member of the audience gets a small sample to taste.

### Five-Spice Chicken

3- to 3½-lb. frying chicken  
2 medium onions, chopped  
3 cloves garlic, crushed  
½ teaspoon fresh ginger, grated  
1 teaspoon Five Spices\*

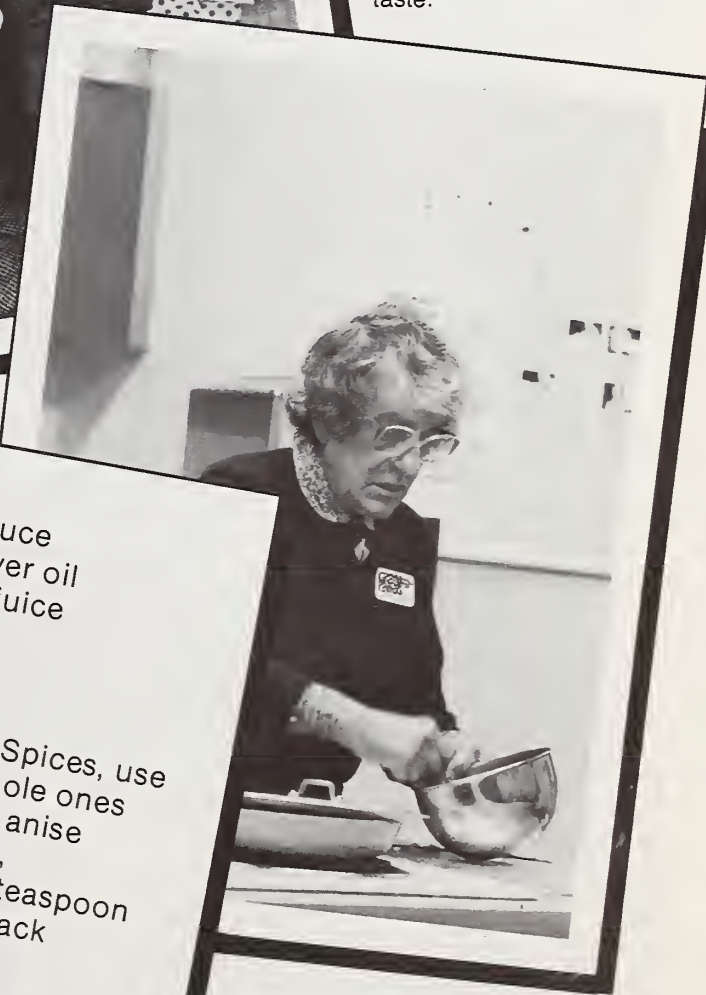
Skin chicken, cut into serving pieces. In a heavy iron skillet, saute onion in oil until golden in color. Remove from skillet. Brown chicken in remaining oil, then add the onion and crushed garlic.

Mix lemon juice, water, sugar, soy sauce, ginger, and Five Spices. Pour over chicken. Cover tightly, simmer over low flame for 45 minutes. Serve with brown rice.

3 tablespoons soy sauce  
3 tablespoons safflower oil  
2 tablespoons lemon juice  
2 tablespoons water  
½ teaspoon sugar

To make your own Five Spices, use star anise (about two whole ones broken up or 1 teaspoon anise seed), ½ teaspoon cloves, ½ teaspoon cinnamon, 1 teaspoon fennel, and ¼ teaspoon black pepper.

Some grocery stores may carry spice combinations similar to this or you can experiment with your own.





# Special Help For Southeast Asian Refugees

For Southeast Asian refugees accustomed to daily food shopping at open-air farmers' markets, suddenly being confronted with the intricacies of the modern supermarket can be bewildering and frightening. They are faced not only with a totally new system of shopping, but also with many unfamiliar foods, and even familiar foods may be packaged in strange new ways.

Working out of a health center in San Francisco's Chinatown, nutritionist Catherine Wong helps these "newcomers," as she calls them, solve the mysteries of the American supermarket. This, she says, is an essential part of nutrition education for this special group.

"In addition to teaching these people the basics of what foods they need to maintain good health," she says, "I teach them the mechanics of how to obtain those foods in an environment totally foreign to them."

## Interest began as a student

Wong, who says she "lives and breathes nutrition," has been interested in the health field all her life. As a child she was inspired by the story of Florence Nightingale and wanted to become a nurse. She came to the United States from Hong Kong in 1969 and began working closely with the health community during high school and college.

As a nurse's aide, she became interested in what patients were fed, and why. She worked at Chinatown Health Center Number 4 as a volunteer at fairs and various other activities.

"I felt I could make a contribution," she says, "and was always looking for opportunities to put my 2-cents-worth in." Wong became interested in the nutritional status of the Chinese people, especially mothers and their infants.

After completing degrees in nutrition, dietetics, and public health, Wong returned to the San Francisco Bay area and convinced Health Center Number 4 to hire her for a couple of months to get a nutrition education component started at the clinic.

"I put the nutrition education program together here," she says,

"and the center believed in it and invited me to stay."

## Tailors teaching to clients' needs

In her work with Southeast Asian refugees, Wong began by taking small groups on shopping trips. She showed them how to use a shopping cart, get through a checkout stand, differentiate between similarly packaged food and nonfood items, and how to tell what is in one of those cleverly designed packages so familiar to the American shopper but a mystery to one who has little or no grasp of the language.

"One of the things we teach is not to open the product packages to check the contents," Wong says.

The shopping trips were a start, but Wong soon found that she could not meet the needs of all her clients.

She began looking for a film or slide series that might substitute for the store visits and reach larger groups.

"The few that I could find were too long and didn't cover the really basic points that were needed. Then, there was the language problem," Wong says.

She decided to develop a special slide-tape series that would take the viewer on a shopping trip with a family. She did this with the help of several colleagues and funding from the University of California and San Francisco General Hospital. The series is available in six Southeast Asian languages as well as English.

"The real key to effective nutrition education is for the instructor to be willing to learn," says Wong. "I know the Chinese culture, which has had great influence throughout Indo-China. Still, there are many dif-





ferences between groups and within groups. I learn every day from clients, fellow health workers, and translators.

"Just as important," Wong says, "is letting each person know that I'm interested in them. If I don't, it's very likely that all my suggestions and recommendations will be ignored."

"I do this by first carefully assessing each client; learning about their culture; assessing their educational levels; reviewing the resources available to them; and observing how they personally view

their problem. Then I gain the confidence of the client by acknowledging their problems and pointing out solutions they can live with. This may take all of the first and second visits, especially if we communicate through an interpreter."

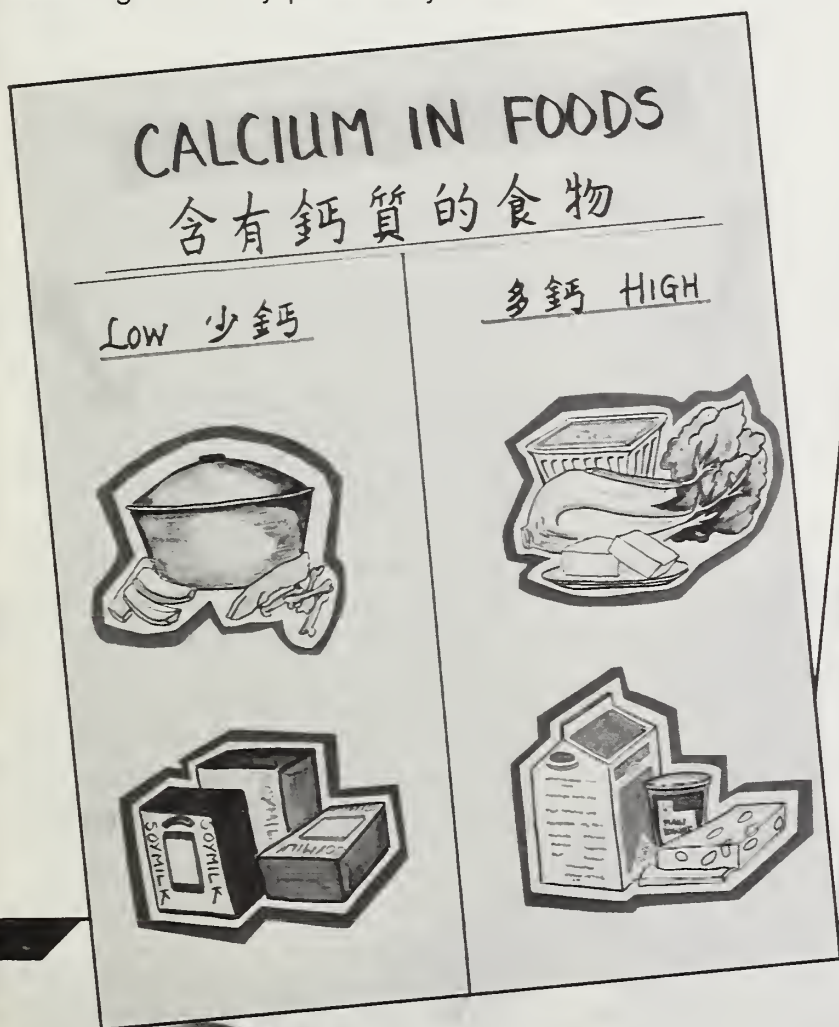
### Cultural preferences make a difference

After learning something about her clients, Wong is careful to tailor her nutrition education and coun-

seling to their specific needs. To do this, she always considers clients as individuals, rather than as part of a homogeneous group.

An example of tailoring nutrition education to people's backgrounds is Wong's suggested use of cheese. Cheese is not a part of the traditional Asian diet, yet many families receive USDA-donated cheese through the surplus food distribution program.

Rather than suggesting that it be used in American-type dishes, Wong suggests that it be used for snacks for the children. Another use suited to the habits of Vietnamese newcomers is as an ingredient in pizza bread (cheese melted on French bread). French bread is popular with the Vietnamese due to past French



Catherine Wong works with clients individually as well as in group settings, often using food demonstrations to encourage them to prepare their favorite foods in healthier ways. For newcomers to this country who cannot read, she uses food models, food packages, and pictures to get across important points.



influence in Vietnam.

When choosing nutrition education tools, she considers the reading level and the cultural orientation of the materials. "Some newcomers may not read in any languages," she says, "however, there are useful materials that do not require reading skills. Things such as food packages, pictures of real foods, or food models."

She pays particular attention to whether the item is culturally sensitive. "A direct translation of a pamphlet originally designed for one group may omit important points or make unrealistic recommendations for another. Time taken to adapt the material will pay off in increased effectiveness," Wong says. "When you can't find materials that are suitable, develop your own."

Wong was instrumental in developing a slide-tape show on dietary management of hypertension. "Many traditional Chinese foods may contribute to hypertension and cardiovascular diseases," she explains. "A culturally sensitive program for the Chinese-American population wasn't available, so we obtained a grant to develop one."

The program, developed with a grant from the California State Hypertension Control Project, is available in both English and Cantonese.

### **Suggests using variety of tools**

"Don't overlook other types of nutrition education tools," encourages Wong. One of her most successful was a Healthy Baby Contest patterned after those in Hong Kong sponsored by commercial firms.

The one sponsored by Health Center Number 4 was designed to provide mothers with an incentive to bring their children to well-baby clinics, insure that the children received vaccinations, and encourage mothers to attend a series of classes in infant care.

"It was lots of work, but definitely worth it in terms of the community involvement and client interest it generated," says Wong.

Wong builds on the positive aspects of her clients' traditional eating habits. "As in most cultures," she says, "food plays a very important part in social occasions and holiday celebrations for Asians."

She has prepared suggestions and

recipes for traditional Chinese New Year holiday foods that are adapted to provide lower content of sodium and fat. "This way," she explains, "clients can enjoy their holiday favorites while still following proper dietary habits."

Wong believes nutrition educators must set realistic goals for themselves and their clients. "Even small changes, such as using less sugar, can mean a long-term improvement process," she points out.

Asking clients to stop eating their favorite "treat" food often will be unsuccessful. Asking clients to limit the number of times the food is eaten is much more acceptable and usually gets better results. Clients who learn that they can successfully limit the number of times they eat something are more likely to attempt other dietary changes.

Wong takes care to avoid overloading her clients with information. "Too many times, clients are presented with more concepts than they can understand and absorb at one time. I've found that it is much more successful to limit the information to one or two important points at one time, especially when counseling individuals."

In addition to counseling clients at Health Center Number 4, Wong works with the prenatal program, with clients with chronic diseases, with senior citizens, and with the preventive health program. In order to reach a larger audience, especially people who may not have access to nutrition advice, Wong has appeared on local Chinese-language television and has a monthly talk show on a Chinese-language radio station.

For people new to this country and to urban life, nutrition education may seem far down on the list of things they learn. "Not so," says Wong. "Gaining access to the food supply by learning how to shop is a necessary skill. And making the right food choices for good health is an essential part of that process. There's no reason why the two can't be taught together."

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*article by Mavis Buchholz  
photos by Tino Serrano*

## **EFNEP: Finding Ways to Reach People**

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), administered by USDA's Extension Service through state Cooperative Extension Services, has been providing nutrition education to low-income homemakers since 1968. The program uses paraprofessional nutrition aides who provide information to participants on nutrition and food shopping, preparation, storage, and sanitation.

In a pilot test completed in 1981, Georgia's Cooperative Extension Service tested a variety of ways to enhance EFNEP services to low-income families, particularly food stamp families. The 1-year project was developed jointly by the state's EFNEP staff and the Extension Communication Department, using a \$420,000 grant from USDA. It involved creative use of mass media, films, and printed materials, coupled with a variety of new educational methods.

### **Reaching more families a goal**

The first part of the project focused on testing ways to increase participation in EFNEP. Project planners developed five different recruitment tools—radio and television public service announcements, direct mail materials, posters, and short films.

According to Ann Peisher, state EFNEP coordinator, the radio and television announcements were especially effective. "We found radio and television increased the credibility of the program and that had a positive impact on enrollment," she says.

"A lot of the people who enroll in EFNEP come from referrals from other professional agencies, and the extent to which a professional or caseworker refers clients to the program depends on his or her own image of it."



"Caseworkers are very much affected by the public image of the program—not necessarily by the effectiveness of it. The more they saw or heard about the program on television or radio, the more credible it seemed to them."

For direct mailing, project coordinators designed and printed brightly colored flyers. The flyers had a short nutrition message and attractive graphics on one side, and on the reverse, a toll-free number to call the Extension Service for nutrition information. These were sent to food stamp participants in the envelopes containing their authorization-to-participate (ATP) cards.

### Some valuable lessons learned

Several of the mailers' messages ("Give Your Baby a Good Start in Life," "Does Your Child Measure Up?") appealed to young homemakers with children—a key group EFNEP seeks to attract.

One, however, appealed to a wide range of potential participants and had some unexpected results. The

front of the card resembled a check for \$450.90 for "good purchasing power," and the back contained the standard information about EFNEP. Unfortunately, says Rob Williams, the Communication Department's media consultant for the project, the check looked a little too realistic.

"Everyone advised me the mailer was not a good idea, but I decided to ignore them, thinking no one would mistake it for a real check," he says. "There are county agents who still don't speak to me. There are grocery store owners all over Georgia who would like to get their hands on me for that."

Williams says he would not use the same approach again—and would certainly not recommend it to others—but it did have the desired effect of attracting people to EFNEP. Some county offices had hundreds of families contact them about EFNEP. Many of these families enrolled.

According to Peisher and Williams, every recruitment tool tested taught them valuable lessons

about who would react, whether the reactions were desired ones, and what results could be effectively measured.

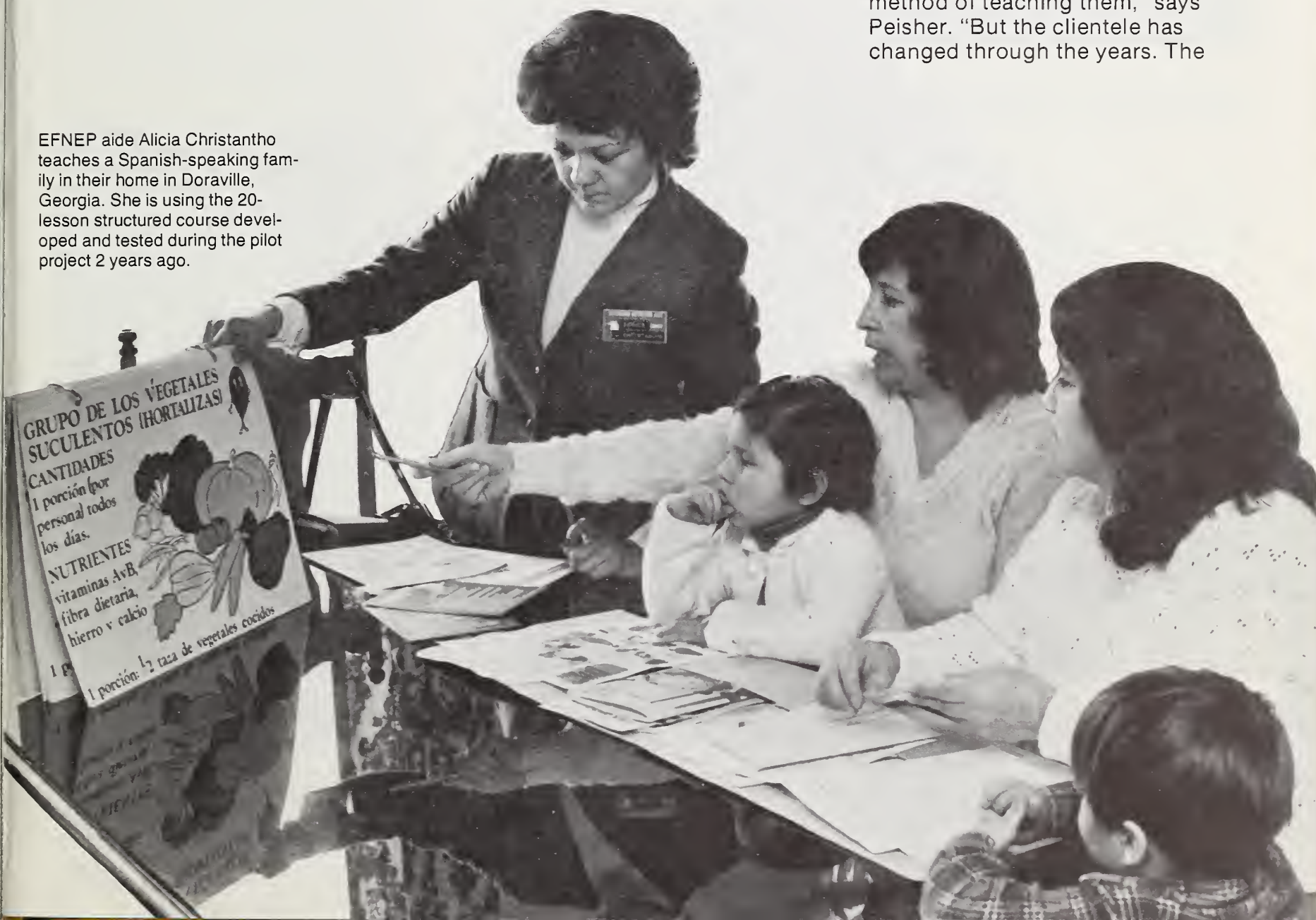
### Several teaching methods tested

The second aspect of Georgia's study—improving the effectiveness of their nutrition education methods—also involved testing several techniques. These included:

- Small group instruction with a program assistant and printed materials.
- Small group instruction with a program assistant and films.
- Television at home with study workbooks.
- A mobile education exhibit.
- Traditional one-to-one instruction (totally individualized).
- Nontraditional one-to-one instruction (based on a structured curriculum).

"We started EFNEP originally with some sound premises—that the individuals we wanted to reach were very isolated culturally, geographically, and socially, and that the one-to-one approach was the best method of teaching them," says Peisher. "But the clientele has changed through the years. The

EFNEP aide Alicia Christantho teaches a Spanish-speaking family in their home in Doraville, Georgia. She is using the 20-lesson structured course developed and tested during the pilot project 2 years ago.







In Scottsdale, Georgia, EFNEP aide Juanita White visits a mother of seven interested in learning more about planning meals for her family.

food stamp recipient of today no longer fits the profile of a 1970 recipient."

Food stamp recipients today, she explains, are generally less isolated, more sophisticated, and better educated. As a result, they are also more discriminating in their acceptance of nutrition education.

"Now we must persuade recipients they can benefit from nutrition education and entice them with education programs and materials that are creative and attractive," she says.

Creativity in content and presentation characterized all the approaches tested, but by far the at-home television series won the distinction of being the most innovative.

Project coordinators conceived of the television series as a way to reach a critical audience—low-income women between the ages of 17 and 25. Other approaches did not reach these women, who were most likely to have children or be preg-

nant and who needed information about food and nutrition for themselves and their families.

Williams surveyed this target audience to determine how and when they used the media. He discovered their highest media usage occurred during television's afternoon soap opera block.

From this finding evolved the concept of a food and nutrition soap opera. Williams and his staff watched soap operas for weeks, identifying common themes, values, and techniques, before developing an 8-part series for EFNEP with the aid of a freelance scriptwriter.

### **Series placed on commercial t.v.**

They placed the series, titled "The Pitts," with commercial television stations in every market in Georgia. It was aired by those stations immediately following regularly scheduled soap operas. "The Pitts" was not advertised on those stations and, according to Williams, no attempt was made to place the series on educational television stations.

"It's almost impossible to get people to change what they perceive as an entertaining station or program to one that is strictly educational," he says. "Our idea was to see if we could use a time, channel, and format that was believed to be totally entertaining and slip education into it."

"The Pitts" definitely entertains. The series is a situation comedy about tenants in the Pitts apartments. The trials and tribulations of the tenants provide opportunities for the characters to offer advice to each other about food and nutrition issues.

Instead of commercials, "The Pitts" contains short segments in which an Extension specialist appears and reinforces the educational concepts slipped into the characters' dialogues. She gives a toll-free number for viewers to call to order a "TV Guide to Good Nutrition" workbook. The workbook contains activities, accompanying each program, for viewers to complete at home and mail in to the EFNEP office.

Although the series was innovative and entertaining, its total impact was difficult to evaluate. However, followup surveys showed that participants who completed the mail-in exercises did increase their nutrition knowledge.

### **Tests suggest new emphasis**

Findings from the tests of the other education methods showed that one-to-one instruction was still the most effective. But, says Peisher, one-to-one instruction based on a structured curriculum outpaced the traditional one-to-one method.

Group instruction proved effective in increasing food and nutrition knowledge for individuals willing to attend the sessions. One drawback, however, was that aides had to spend considerable time organizing these sessions and working to maintain participation in them. This offset some of the anticipated savings of time and effort.

Since completion of its EFNEP pilot project, the Georgia Cooperative Extension Service has restructured its approach to nutrition education for low-income households. One-to-one instruction has been retained as the primary teaching method, but aides now teach according to a 20-lesson structured course.

"We've found ways to make one-to-one more effective," says Peisher. "For example, I think program aides teach better because they have a guide and lessons to follow."

How is EFNEP currently operating



Twenty-five of Georgia's 159 counties have EFNEP programs. County EFNEP coordinators work closely with the state Extension staff, who provide training, materials, consultation, and other support.



at the local level in Georgia, and is it producing results?

Anita Reed, EFNEP coordinator for DeKalb County, says she sees definite progress. The diets of EFNEP participants are improving, and their test scores on knowledge of food and nutrition are increasing. In addition, some homemakers, inspired by the skills they have learned in EFNEP, have sought and obtained jobs in food service at local hospitals and restaurants.

Reed's staff recruits EFNEP enrollees at places where low-income people congregate—food stamp offices, WIC clinics, and community centers in particular. To build interest in the program, her aides conduct food demonstrations in these locations or show the short films developed during the pilot project. They have also taught at sites where USDA-donated foods were distributed.

### **Families need basic skills**

In general, Reed identifies money management—how to budget food stamps and cash and how to select and buy food—as the biggest nutrition education need of food stamp families.

"They need to know what to buy to balance their diets," she explains. Reed's aides encourage families to include more vegetables, fruit, and milk in their diets and to prepare more casseroles to make the meat they buy stretch further.

Obesity is another common problem of low-income homemakers. "These women may not want nutrition education," says Reed, "but they are interested in weight control."

She turns this to her advantage, enrolling the women in "Weight Off Wisely," a course taught for 6 weeks in the home and then later in group sessions. Under the guise of weight control, EFNEP aides can teach them about food and fitness.

Anita Reed, EFNEP coordinator for DeKalb County, is in charge of one of the largest EFNEP programs in the state. She trains and supervises eight EFNEP aides, who work with homemakers throughout the county. Here, she puts the finishing touches on a chart for a training meeting.

During 1983, Georgia's EFNEP aides reached 8,000 low-income homemakers with their nutrition education lessons. In 1984, they hope to reach even more as they continue implementing findings of the pilot project.

### **Knowledge can make a difference**

According to Ann Peisher, one of the bonuses of the project was that it tested the effectiveness of Georgia's EFNEP program with a control group for the first time.

In districts where the pilot project was tested, interviewers contacted food stamp recipients in counties that did not have EFNEP programs. Interviewers asked these participants a series of questions about food recall and behavior at 2-month intervals during an 8-month period.

EFNEP participants in pilot project counties were tested at the same time using the same method.

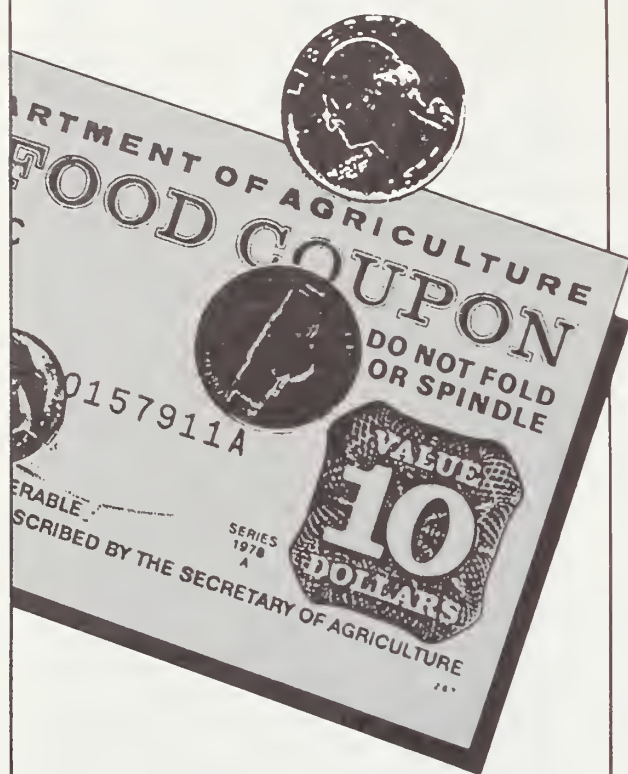
When the comparison was completed, says Peisher, "we had statistically significant findings that EFNEP was effective when compared to the control group. It was effective in changing food consumption patterns and in changing nutrition knowledge. And knowledge, of course, is the prerequisite to all other changed behavior."

For more information on the Georgia EFNEP project or the materials produced for it, contact: Ann Peisher, EFNEP Coordinator Cooperative Extension Service University of Georgia College of Agriculture Athens, Georgia 30602 Telephone: 404-542-3773

*article by Brenda Schuler  
photos by Larry Rana*







## How much can offices do?

"I see providing nutrition information as an extension of the food stamp certification officer's responsibility," said Samuel Robinson, a food stamp certification supervisor for the Washington, D.C., Department of Human Services.

Countered Donna Taylor, food stamp certification supervisor in Prince William County, Virginia, "I am unwilling as a food stamp supervisor to go back to my case-workers and tell them to spend 10 minutes more on nutrition when what I really want is for the case to be perfect when it's finished. They are not trained in nutrition and wouldn't feel comfortable doing a lesson on it. Their job is to know food stamp policy."

"The workers themselves are not at all negative about sharing nutrition ideas," said Jane Echenhofer, food stamp eligibility supervisor in Alexandria, Virginia. "They want to do something positive. They would be willing to give out information like an idea sheet on nutritious breakfasts or lunches. That takes 10 seconds. They have 10 seconds, but not 10 minutes. That's what we can do."

## Single-concept flyers suggested

They all agreed that single-concept one-page flyers that could be stuffed into envelopes and mailed might be an excellent way to get nutrition information to participants. This would be more effective, they felt, than giving clients material to read in food stamp offices.

"In the office the atmosphere is too tense for people to read information on nutrition," said Echenhofer. "They are concerned mostly about how many stamps they are getting. They are dealing with so much that they are not really hearing. It would be better if they could have a pamphlet at home and read it."

John Huppert, an eligibility training specialist in Fairfax County, agreed. "Clients are bombarded with pamphlets right at the beginning," he said. "We have a little form letter

we send out with the authorization-to-participate (ATP) card that tells them what foods they can and can't buy. It has a few paragraphs on nutrition in it. I think there's a greater chance of them reading that just because it doesn't come with the whole packet the first day."

Helping participants stretch their food dollars was what the group felt should be the objective. One or two recipes or shopping tips would be more effective than a large booklet. Booklets, they felt, have too much information.

Said Robinson, "Clients are frightened by vast amounts of material they'll have to read." The group agreed that there should be separate sheets with ideas for nutritious breakfasts, lunches, and dinners.

The theme of simplicity and practicality came up again and again. "Target the materials to the concerns of food stamp participants," said Echenhofer. "Recipes have to catch their eye and give practical information on the simplest, cheapest ways to buy and prepare nutritious foods. They have to think they can actually do it."

## Audio-visuals can be helpful

Using audio-visuals was another approach to disseminating nutrition information that the group thought had potential.

Said Donna Taylor, "I'm willing to incorporate slides on nutrition into the slide show I am developing for participants to watch before they come in for their interview."

Taylor is in the process of creating a slide show for food stamp participants to view while they are having their group interview, which precedes individual interviews. The 30- to 45-minute slide presentation will tell them about their rights and responsibilities as participants and will give them practical information on where to shop with food stamps and what they can buy with them.

"This approach gives participants necessary information and at the same time frees up some of the eligibility worker's time," said Taylor. "The worker can start the slide

# How Much Can Local Food Stamp Offices Do?

Over the years, the Food and Nutrition Service has been concerned with informing food stamp participants about good nutrition so they can purchase and prepare nutritious meals for their families within the constraints of a food stamp budget.

The goal of the Food Stamp Program since its inception has been to allow low-income households to obtain a more nutritious diet. The question has always been, "What is the best way to do this?"

To help answer this question and plan future information activities, Bonnie Polk of FNS' public information office got several food stamp eligibility workers and supervisors from the Washington, D.C., and Baltimore areas together with several FNS staffers to exchange ideas. What the nine who came said might be useful to others involved in planning educational activities.



# Wake Up to Nutrition

show, leave the room, and then come back and answer any questions."

The use of videotapes can also be effective in this way, according to Marjorie Nesbitt, an income maintenance specialist in Baltimore City. "This approach doesn't take away from the worker's time," she said. "Maybe when walk-in clients see a videotape playing a number of times while they are waiting for 30 to 45 minutes, they might get the nutrition message one of those times."

"I think if there were video presentations available," said Echenhofer, "I could go back to our director and say, 'We have a videotape and we need a video machine to play it.' We might get it. It wouldn't be a bad idea because it would focus some of the energy in the waiting room."

## Do you have ideas to share?

Certification offices in West Virginia have already been educating food stamp participants with audiotapes. For the past 7 months, Bob Bell, assistant director of training for the West Virginia State Department of Human Services, has been sending out cassette tapes to the state's 27 area offices.

Interspersed with music are "informercials," which are announcements about various aspects of the Food Stamp Program that participants should know. "People are used to hearing music everywhere they go," says Bell. "We feel that this is a good, inexpensive way to get their attention and educate them."

If your office is educating food stamp participants in these or any other ways, we'd like to hear about it. We'll be keeping a file of ideas from around the country and may be including them in a future issue of *Food and Nutrition*. Send them to: Bonnie W. Polk  
Office of Public Information  
Food and Nutrition Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture

article by Bonnie W. Polk

"What's the best way to start off the day? Give everyone in your family a good breakfast, including yourself, mom. It can be cereal and milk, juice, and a scrambled egg, or a cheese sandwich and a cup of tomato soup. Whatever your druthers, serve a breakfast today and every day. Send your family off with a good start on a great day!"

That's a message from Bob Bell on his weekly radio program, "Wake Up. . .Country Style." What's unique about this 15-minute taped show is that it has been produced as a service to low-income families at very little cost for almost 13 years.

Bell, an assistant division director at the Department of Human Services in Charleston, West Virginia, created the show and has been writing, announcing, recording, editing, taping, and distributing it ever since. He does all of this in less than a day.

## Information and low-cost recipes

"The purpose of the program," says Bell, "is to give nutrition information to low-income families and people on fixed incomes, particularly older people. We tell people how to spend their money wisely and how they can get the most nutrition for their food dollars."

"The Extension Service helps by giving us food information. My wife volunteers her time each week to do the voice for a segment on low-cost, nutritious recipes called the 'Country Kitchen.' We provide copies of these recipes to anyone in the audience who writes in for them. I'm going to be developing cheese and butter recipes soon to help people who use these donated foods."

Every program also has a section on food stamps, particularly eligibility information and tips on how to shop wisely with stamps. "There's nothing wrong with snacks," says Bell in one of his segments, "but try to keep everything in perspective. Use your food stamps wisely and buy good food for you and your family."

The program is not all conversation either. In fact, what makes it very popular with the 10 country stations who have carried it since its

inception is that the nutrition advice is interspersed with authentic mountain music that Bell has gotten at no cost.

When the show first began, Bell went to state fairs and local music jamborees to tape the music. In the last couple of years, he has been able to gather music without having to tape it himself. "Remember," he says on the show, "if you would like to sing on 'Wake Up. . .Country Style,' drop me a line. . ."

## Costs no more than \$45 a week

The program is not expensive to produce. "It's not a line item," says Bell. "It costs no more than \$45 a week in time, postage, and tape costs. And the stations send the tapes back so that we can use them again."

Over the years, Bell has received more than 1,000 pieces of mail supporting his program. When he thought about dropping the show years ago, there was an outcry against it at public hearings.

Leon Ginsberg, the Commissioner of West Virginia's Department of Human Services and president of the American Public Welfare Association, is one of those supporters. "It doesn't cost us anything," says Ginsberg. "The portion of time that Bell uses in producing the program is matched 50-50 with USDA funds. I feel the program is worthwhile and should continue."

Walter Trumble, the owner and general manager of WPDJ in Clarksburg, West Virginia, agrees. He has been airing the program since Bell first produced it.

"I think giving nutrition information out to people who need it is worthwhile and that this is a responsibility a radio station should fulfill," he says. "The quality of Bell's tapes are fine. Let's give more information out!"

For more information on Bob Bell's programs, write:  
Bob Bell  
West Virginia Department of Human Services  
1900 Washington Street, East  
Charleston, West Virginia 25305  
Telephone: 304-348-8834

article by Bonnie W. Polk



# 245 Making Food

## Activities Continue In Many Areas . . .

At a regional workshop in Chicago early last summer, Soneeta Grogan heard USDA's Isabel Wolf talk about helping families stretch their food dollars. Flanked by a grocery cart full of food she had shopped for the day before, Wolf told Grogan and other workshop participants how with careful buying, a family of four could eat nutritious well-balanced meals for \$58.00 a week.

Wolf, who is administrator of USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service, introduced a new booklet from USDA with menu plans and recipes to help families who want to economize make the most of their food dollars. The booklet and the workshops—both called "Making Food Dollars Count"—were part of a national food buying education project launched last year with regional workshops in seven cities.



The goal of the workshops was to draw attention to local nutrition resources and to encourage nutrition professionals and paraprofessionals to use ideas and information from the workshops in their own communities. That's exactly what Soneeta Grogan and many other nutrition professionals have done.

### Taking the ideas to the local level

Grogan, who was a member of the planning committee for the Chicago workshop, is coordinator of the Illinois Cooperative Extension Service's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). In preparation for the workshop, she talked with her field staff and asked them how they could use the menus and recipes from USDA in their work with families.

"In Illinois, there are about 10,000 homemakers who participate in EFNEP," says Grogan. "These women are learning how to buy food and prepare economical meals for their families. We felt the recipes, menus, and shopping tips in the *Making Food Dollars Count* booklet could be very helpful to them."

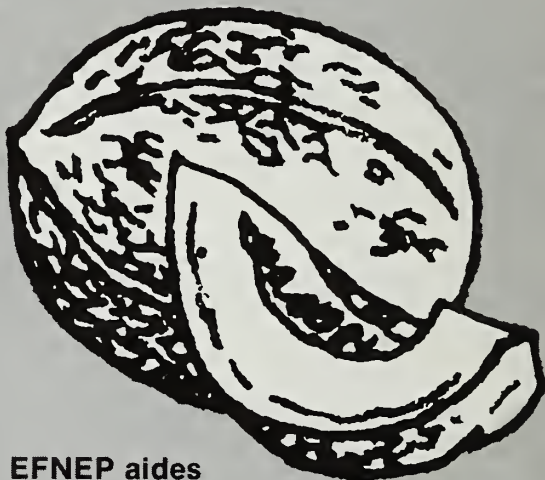
According to Grogan, the materials have been used by Extension home economists throughout the state. County EFNEP staff have used the materials to train the nutrition aides who work with homemakers in local communities, and they've come up with a variety of creative ways to reach families.

In some counties, local grocery stores have pitched in with special promotions. Champaign County currently has a contest underway to see how many homemakers can feed their families for \$58 a week for an extended period—4 or 5 months. There will be awards from local stores for the homemakers who are most successful, with the top award of \$58 going to the winner.

About one-tenth of EFNEP participants in Illinois are Spanish-speaking, and Grogan's staff felt special efforts needed to be made to tailor *Making Food Dollars Count* to this group. Elsie Gonzalez, Extension EFNEP advisor in the north Chicago area office, translated all the recipes from the booklet, listing them side by side in English and Spanish in the revised version.

"Having the recipes printed side by side in both languages is especially helpful to Spanish-speaking persons in cases where they are unfamiliar with ingredients," says Gonzalez. "They can show the food

store clerk the corresponding name of the ingredient in English and learn what the item is."



### EFNEP aides see changes

According to Gonzalez, EFNEP aides have found *Making Food Dollars Count* materials useful in the lessons they give Spanish-speaking EFNEP participants. The aides say the homemakers are now making grocery lists more often, buying in larger quantities for economy, and making more price comparisons between stores and brands.

They're also including some different items on their grocery lists to learn about them. Cottage cheese is one of the new foods they are trying, and EFNEP aides suggest ways to use it.

"Many of the women come from countries where they shopped daily to get the food for meals," says Gonzalez. "Here in the United States they had to learn about storage containers and correct storage methods. They used to throw away leftovers. Now they divide them up into portions and freeze them."

EFNEP homemakers now try generic products more, Gonzalez says, and when they find the quality comparable or satisfactory for the planned use, they will purchase them.

"Comparing prices has been very helpful," she says. "Homemakers find they can save 25 to 30 cents or more on generics. Many didn't realize the nutritive value is as good. We also tell them to watch for sales on name brands, since there may be times when they are as good a buy as the generics."



# Dollars Count

*Making Food Dollars Count* materials have been particularly useful in teaching homemakers how to follow recipes. Aides report that more of their clients are now using recipes to add variety to their meals. Instead of using the recipes exactly as they appear, however, aides suggest homemakers add seasonings to taste.

"Many recipes in *Making Food Dollars Count* are very bland to Hispanics," says Gonzalez. "The aides suggest adding ingredients like tomato sauce, garlic, onion, pepper, and oregano, which are typical ingredients in Hispanic dishes."

Gonzalez is currently helping USDA translate a number of other information materials for low-income families. She has just finished working on a translation of a fact sheet on USDA commodities for use by migrant workers in other parts of the state.

## Helping newcomers learn about food

In New Jersey, nutritionist Yvonne Jones has been using *Making Food Dollars Count* materials to help other groups with special nutrition education needs. Like Gonzalez, Jones has tailored the recipes to the cultural preferences of the people she serves.

In recent years, thousands of Haitians and Cubans have settled in northern New Jersey, joining enclaves of earlier immigrants from their home countries. In 1981, the New Jersey State Department of Health began a 2-year project, funded through the Refugee Assistance Act of 1980, to help provide housing and health and nutrition services to these people. Yvonne Jones was the nutritionist for the project.

According to project director Lillian Bajda, one of the goals of the project was developing a local resource system which would help the Haitians and Cubans become self-sufficient by learning to use services of local health departments, ambulatory care facilities, hospitals, and health centers.

In each of the four counties where the project operated—Essex, Union, Hudson, and Passaic—bilingual outreach workers were hired to work with these special groups. The outreach workers found that approximately one-fourth, 27 percent, of their problems were nutrition related.

Yvonne Jones brought her expertise to bear on the problems, counseling the outreach workers about available community resources. "She knew the resources of the National School Lunch Program for the children and congregate meals for the elderly," Bajda says. "When the *Making Food Dollars Count* materials became available, she found them a very useful resource.

"Every dollar these people get has to count," Bajda adds. "Food is basic to their existence and these materials help them budget wisely and conserve."



## Shopping tips translated...

Jean-Pierre Henry, outreach worker for the city of Irvington, where several thousand Haitians have settled, translated the *Making Food Dollars Count* shopping tips into French. Jones and Henry supplemented the menus with recipes using foods familiar to the Haitians. They also introduced some new foods, like winter squash, to encourage the Haitians to include in their diets some fruits and vegetables that are plentiful in the northeastern United States.

This past December, Jones, Henry, and Gloria Clark, home economist with the Essex County Welfare Board, presented a nutrition education program for the new Haitians at the Irvington Public

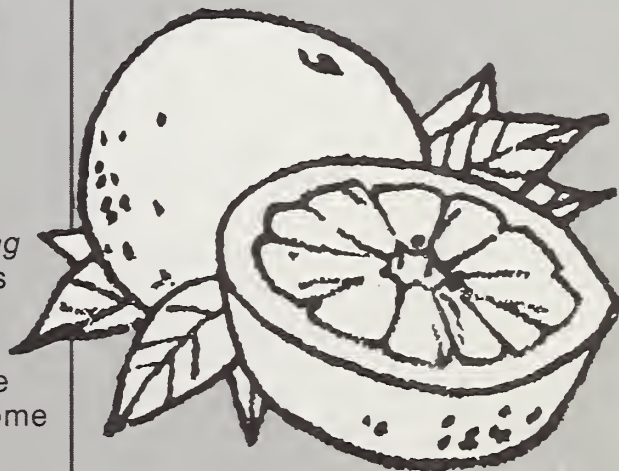
Library. They talked about various options shoppers have during different seasons and showed the Haitians samples of canned and frozen foods, which are new to them.

Questions asked by the Haitian men and women showed their interest in the information and also the need for assistance with translation of food ads. "Right now we need more materials in French and Creole," Jones says, "however, the Haitians do need to learn to read in English."

Jones suggested that *Eating for Better Health*, a Food and Nutrition Service publication, be used as an elementary reader by people taking classes in English as a second language. Holiday gift-wrapped copies of the publication were distributed at the December meeting.

## Similar activities in other areas

Throughout the country, programs to reach low-income families have been conducted. In many areas, Extension home economists have taken the lead in distributing *Making Food Dollars Count* materials and coordinating local activities.



In Atlantic County, New Jersey, Extension home economist Dianne Lennon reproduced 125 copies of the USDA booklet to meet immediate requests from families who had seen Isabel Wolf on television.

To reach a wider audience, Lennon contacted the food editor of



the *Atlantic City Press*, who ran a weekly series of five articles with the menus and recipes from the booklet. The *Atlantic City Press* is a daily newspaper with a circulation of 56,000. Lennon has also trained five EFNEP aides to use *Making Food Dollars Count* materials in their work with low-income homemakers.

"*Making Food Dollars Count* helps document that a low-income family of four can have a nutritious diet on \$58 a week," says Lennon. "Many families had thought this was impossible, but they found the recipes were good and they enjoyed the meals."

Lennon and EFNEP aide-coordinator Alberta Martin helped train staff at an emergency food cupboard program in Cape May County, using *Making Food Dollars Count* as a guide in making up the best food packages for families.

Ellawese McLendon, another New Jersey Extension home economist, has developed a special program on meal planning for low-income families. McLendon, who works in Union County, presents the program to community groups on request.

Barbara O'Neill, Extension home economist in Sussex County, featured *Making Food Dollars Count* on her weekly radio show. She also used the information as part of a training program for directors of group homes for the mentally retarded early this year.

Private groups have also helped. United Steel Workers of America is distributing *Making Food Dollars Count* to its 3,780 local unions to provide food buying assistance to unemployed members. To increase the appeal of the materials to members in southern states, the union added a special southern recipe supplement developed by the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service. A letter written by Leon Lynch, USWA International Vice President for Human Affairs, was sent to local union representatives with sample booklets and information on how to order copies.

#### **Workshops held in some states**

In some areas, state workshops patterned after the regional workshops have been held. A number of these workshops have been cooperative efforts of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and state and local agencies.

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, for example, a workshop was held for EFNEP aides and others working with low-income families. More than 100 people attended the workshop.

In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, a *Making Food Dollars Count* workshop drew more than 200 participants, including homemakers, retired persons, and students, as well as nutrition professionals and aides. The workshop was organized by staff of FNS' Southwest Regional Office and three state agencies in Louisiana—the state departments of agriculture, education, and health and human services.

June Burkett, regional director of nutrition and technical services for FNS, was interviewed before the workshop on a morning talk show, "Tune-In." Later, three television stations covered Burkett's trip to a local supermarket, where she purchased the week's food supply for the menus in the *Making Food Dollars Count* booklet.

The workshop was videotaped for use statewide with other audiences, including EFNEP and WIC participants, and many newspapers ran articles featuring the event. At the workshop, Baton Rouge "PM Magazine" host, Debra Sowers, emceed a recipe demonstration and explained preparation steps to the audience.

In New Mexico, FNS staffers worked with representatives of the New Mexico Indian Health Service to adapt the *Making Food Dollars Count* menus for use in workshops for Native American groups.

#### **Copies of booklet still available**

USDA has limited supplies available free to agencies and organizations working with low-income families. For information on obtaining bulk copies, contact your state Cooperative Extension Service office or the nearest regional office of the Food and Nutrition Service. Single copies may be purchased for 50 cents each from the Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colorado 81009.

In the coming year, USDA is planning additional educational efforts and materials to help families get the most nutritional value for their food dollars.

article by Martha A. Poolton

# **Some Advice From Two Food Stamp Participants**

## **Careful Planning Makes A Difference**

As she walks through the aisles of her favorite supermarket in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Marjorie Chapman closely inspects the prices and labels of the food she is going to purchase. Until recently, Chapman was solely responsible for raising a family of six.

With no formal training in nutrition, she learned, by doing and figuring out what works best, how to budget and prepare meals for six children and herself. Chapman now has two daughters, aged 11 and 16, living at home, and she is looking for a full-time job.

The experience she's gained in wise food shopping and meal preparation are still serving her well as she meets her family's food needs on \$121 a month in food stamps.

#### **Begins with the newspaper**

In a way, Marjorie Chapman approaches her shopping like a soldier. She launches her attack—her monthly shopping trip—with a variety of weapons. "My first weapon is the newspaper," she explains. "I get the food ads and study them, particularly for the week when I do my major grocery shopping."

She obtains her food stamps usually on the ninth or tenth day of each month. "That week, I go to the store and buy about 90 percent of what I need for the entire month," she says. Her remaining food stamps are saved for items such as fresh milk, bread, and meat that she expects to go on sale later in the month.

Chapman says her 18-cubic-foot freezer helps a lot. "I made a deliberate effort several years ago to buy a freezer," she says. "When something goes on sale, especially meat, I can fill up my freezer and not have to





Armed with her newspaper and keeping an eye out for special buys, Marjorie Chapman shops for food at her favorite supermarket.

buy it again until there's another sale."

She estimates that her freezer saves her \$15 to \$20 a month in food costs and that the added cost of electricity is only about \$2 a month.

"You can sometimes find a good used freezer for \$50 and, if you go in with a neighbor on it, it's even cheaper to operate when it's full," she says.

Even without a freezer, a food stamp household can save on food costs, says Chapman. "There is nothing wrong with filling your shelves full of canned goods, and there are even some canned meats that occasionally are on sale.

"I'm the kind of person who gets uncomfortable when my pantry gets low, so I deliberately look for inexpensive canned items that I can use to make meals in a pinch," she says.

For example, Chapman's family enjoys spaghetti dishes, which can easily be made using a can of mushroom stems and pieces, a jar of spaghetti sauce, a box of spaghetti, and cheese.

### **Shops monthly for most foods**

Chapman makes sure to keep a running inventory of foods used and

needed during the month. "Try to keep a record of everything you use during one month, no matter how many times you go to the store," she advises.

"You'll get a better handle on how much food you actually need, and, in the next month when you go shopping again, make sure you buy as much of everything as you need on one trip so you won't have to go back again."

Shopping once a month saves on transportation costs. Chapman owns a car and neighbors often join her on her monthly shopping trip. "But if you don't have a car," she says, "it's not as expensive to pay someone to take you to the store once a month as it is several times a month."

When Chapman does her monthly shopping, she spends quite a bit of time looking for generic foods. These are foods that are not identified by brand name and that cost less than brand name items because they are packaged less elaborately.

Chapman's favorite supermarket displays all of its generic products in one long aisle. There she stocks up on canned fruits and vegetables, macaroni products, peanut butter, and other nonbrand items.

She has found that these items are

priced from 10 to 50 percent less than brand name items. A 2-pound jar of generic peanut butter, for example, costs Chapman around \$1.39, while the same size brand name peanut butter sells for somewhat more, from \$1.59 and higher.

Her supermarket also carries fresh generic meats and vegetables, items not usually associated with the term "generic."

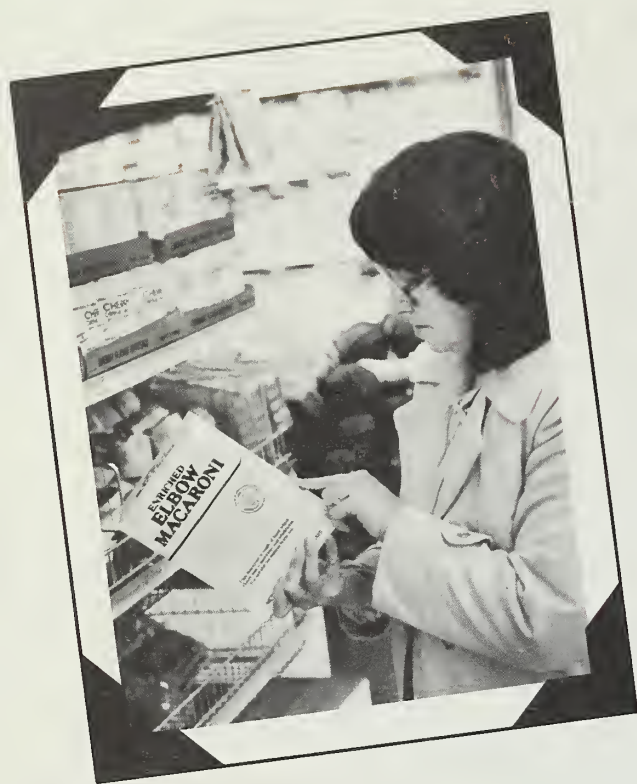
"I was surprised myself when I came across these items," she recalls. "They've got, for instance, fresh apples marked 'generic.' These apples come in odd sizes, some appearing lopsided. But when you cook them for apple sauce, their size changes anyway and your stomach isn't going to know the difference, so who cares?"

### **Shops carefully for bargains**

On her monthly shopping trip, Chapman does not hesitate to stop by the rack of produce marked "reduced." Recently she found 4.13 pounds of bananas for \$1.03 or about 25 cents a pound.

"The peels were turning a little brown, but the bananas were just ripe enough to make a great banana cake," she says. That day, bananas were regularly priced at 39 cents a





Buying generic products can often result in savings, Chapman finds. Her store displays generic products in one long aisle, making it easy for shoppers to find them.

pound, so on one item alone, she saved 58 cents.

For the spaghetti and the salad her children like, Chapman found three green peppers for 19 cents on the reduced rack. Usually, three of these sell for \$1.00, so on this buy, she saved 81 cents. "After a while, those cents add up to dollars," she smiles. "The peppers were only slightly bruised, and for a sauce they were just fine."

To make her food stamps stretch, Chapman avoids buying convenience foods whose prices are often marked up to reflect processing and advertising costs.

"However," she says, "sometimes it's worth buying a convenience food just once to see if you like it and also to save the label that lists the ingredients," she explains.

"You can invest in the ingredients listed and experiment for yourself by trying to duplicate the food. That's how I got my recipe for skillet lasagna, which I use over and over again."

### **Prepares most foods herself**

Teaching her family good eating habits has helped Chapman manage her food budget. "I started with the children when they were young, having them eat what was prepared but also asking them what foods

they liked. They learned to stop rejecting foods when I'd ask them, 'How do you know you don't like that vegetable if you've never tasted it before?'"

Occasionally, the children complain about the food. "My 16-year-old complained about what I was preparing, so I told her to figure out what we should buy for the month."

Her daughter, having picked up some of her mother's techniques, did the shopping but realized how careful she had to be to stay within the budget. "She now has suggestions for low-cost meals, particularly those combining meat with more vegetables."

Her two daughters also like sandwiches a great deal, particularly peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, which provide a good deal of protein. Chapman shops at a surplus baked goods store where, on a Wednesday, she can get four or five loaves of bread for \$1.00. She buys a month's worth of bread for less than \$5.00 and stores it in the freezer.

The family's food budget was helped when USDA surplus cheese and butter became available. "When the kids get a hold of that cheese, there go cheese sandwiches like crazy," Chapman laughs. "They love it, and it's some of the best cheese I've ever eaten, except for some I made at home once."

Chapman prides herself on making many foods from scratch, including cookies, cakes, biscuits, pudding, and even yogurt. She makes yogurt with 36 ounces of warm water, 2½ cups of powdered milk, and ½ cup of plain yogurt.

A yogurt processor may seem like a luxury item, but Chapman finds it saves her time over making yogurt at home using other methods, and it's more economical than buying yogurt at the store.

"I will spend my last money, if necessary, to buy a piece of equipment for the kitchen that can save me money," she says. "When somebody wants to give me a present, I ask for this or that for the kitchen."

A crock pot and a deep fryer were gifts from friends, and a blender was a gift from one of her children. She also has an electric grinder.

"If chuck steak is on sale for less money than hamburger," she says, "I buy it and grind it on my own. Sure, you may lay out money buying the appliance, but you save a lot of money in the long run."

### **Plans to help other families**

With her experience in food buying and preparation, Marjorie Chapman is now planning a workshop for Kalamazoo area residents on living on a tight budget. "If I can do it, maybe I can teach somebody else how to do it," she says.

Chapman believes getting nutrition information to low-income people is important, and she prefers the workshop approach. Publications on nutrition help, she says, but she advises against providing too much printed material during a person's first encounter with a social service office.

"This kind of information is seldom absorbed if it's given to you all at once," she says. "But you still need it in a hurry, so maybe case-workers could provide details about local workshops and resources on shopping wisely and getting good nutrition."

For her workshop, Chapman is contacting newspapers for extra copies of food ads, collecting USDA materials and other publications, and arranging for transportation for workshop participants to go on shopping trips together. "If you don't actually use the information you get, you soon lose it," she says.

Besides planning her workshop, Chapman volunteers as secretary of the board of directors of the Douglas Community Association in Kalamazoo and as chairperson of the education committee for the Kalamazoo Northside Association for Community Development, for which she edits the monthly newsletter.

Most of all, she is looking for a job in business. Over the years, she has taken college courses and recently graduated from Western Michigan University with a bachelor's degree in business administration.

Once she obtains that job, she doesn't plan to forget what she learned while raising a family of six on a low income. She even has an idea for another workshop she'd eventually like to give in her spare time. "I call it 'Farewell to Welfare,'" she smiles.

For more information, write:  
Marjorie Chapman  
Douglas Community Association  
1000 Paterson Street  
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007  
Telephone: 616-343-6185

*article and photos  
by Victor Omelczenko*



## Using Coupons Helps, Too

Joy Alexander, a member of the Walthall County, Mississippi, welfare advisory council, arrived at the October council session early. Alexander, a food stamp participant, had some news she wanted to share with the other members.

"Look," she said, holding up a \$1 dollar food stamp, "this month for the first time ever I have part of my food stamp allotment left over." She explained that her food stamps usually ran out before the month ended. This particular month, however, with the use of cents-off coupons, she had stretched her food stamps over the full issuance period.

As Alexander shared her shopping techniques with the council, her enthusiasm spread. Someone suggested she teach a workshop on couponing for other food stamp families—a suggestion she willingly accepted.

With some hasty planning, she held her first workshop in early November. Afterwards, many people—both food stamp participants and the general public—called to say they were interested in attending if another workshop were held. Alexander scheduled a second workshop for February and expanded the agenda to include tips on food



preparation, shopping, and budgeting, based on her own personal experience.

Although Alexander hopes she doesn't stay on the Food Stamp Program long, she says she is not ashamed to participate because she needs the assistance and she knows she uses her food stamps wisely. Teaching others how to make the best use of their food stamps, she feels, is her way of expressing her gratitude for the help she receives.

Alexander lost her job last year. Her unemployment benefits have been exhausted, and jobs are scarce in Walthall County where unemployment averaged 10 percent last year. She has two teenage daughters still living at home—one of whom has a serious illness. In addition, she helps care for an 84-year-old aunt. Careful budgeting is a necessity for the Alexander family.

### Sometimes saves \$15 or \$20 a week

"Couponing helps me get my mind off my problems," Alexander says. Her self-taught couponing techniques are uncomplicated but effective. So effective, in fact, she bought \$17.61 in merchandise for 28 cents the first time she used cents-off coupons.

According to Alexander, this was an unusually great savings resulting from a special promotion the store was having that day. Still, she says,

even on regular days, savings are often substantial.

In a typical week, Alexander saves between \$6.50 and \$12.00 on food by using coupons. If her grocery store sponsors a double coupon promotion, she can save \$15 or \$20.

"Before I started couponing, I was without food stamps at least one week each month," she explains. "Now I can usually make my food stamps last all month."

When she receives her monthly food stamp allotment, she divides the total by four to determine what amount she can spend on food in a week, then she places the food stamp books in four envelopes—one envelope for each week.

She checks the grocery store ads in the local news and identifies those sale items for which she has coupons. By using her cents-off coupons primarily for sale items, her savings add up more quickly.

Her coupons come from a variety of sources. Alexander clips some from the local paper or from the back of food packages. Others are given to her by friends or relatives. For example, her mother, who lives in Montana, regularly mails her coupons. Also, Alexander and four other women in her community have formed a coupon swapping club.

In her workshops, Alexander told participants the location of three coupon exchange boxes in Walthall County and encouraged them to



Being organized is the key to Joy Alexander's success with coupons. She carefully saves and files coupons for foods she uses, like this one for ketchup and others (above) for soup.





take advantage of the exchanges like she does. Although the county food stamp certification office does not have a coupon exchange box, both Alexander and county welfare director Sharon Whitt like the idea of placing one there.

Do most participants know they can use cents-off coupons with their food stamps?

"No," answers Alexander quickly. "After the workshop, several people receiving food stamps contacted me and said they didn't know they could use coupons with their stamps."

Store employees are not always informed either, she observes. "The first time I tried to use coupons, a grocery store cashier told me she could not accept coupons with food stamps. I didn't try to use coupons again until I saw someone else use them with food stamps," Alexander says. "I later found out that the store did accept coupons with food stamps. The cashier just didn't know the policy."

County welfare director Whitt agrees that the average food stamp participant doesn't know cents-off coupons can be used with food stamps. "If participants do know," Whitt says, "they probably don't

realize that coupons are worthwhile."

That's why Whitt believes Joy Alexander's workshops are so effective. Alexander's personal example proves couponing does help.

### **Emphasizes buying nutritious foods**

At the workshops, Alexander displayed several food products, cents-off coupons, and refund blanks. She described where to find coupons, how to file them, and how to redeem them to achieve maximum savings. Her presentation was practical and easily understood.

She advised workshop participants to buy nutritious foods with their coupons. "Just because you have a coupon, don't use it if you don't need the item or if it's for something that's not good for you," she cautioned the group, describing how she gives away coupons for highly sugared cereals in exchange for coupons for other foods.

Foods for which coupons are most commonly available include cereals, dairy products, and condiments. Alexander finds few, if any, coupons for meat or fresh fruit and vegetables, but she has other ways,

besides couponing, to stretch her food budget to cover such necessities.

Last summer she canned 500 jars of food and filled two freezers with produce from her garden. She cans soup, freezes fruits and vegetables, and makes her own jelly and preserves. "It's amazing what you can do with even a little plot of land," she says.

Surprisingly, Alexander grew up in a city, but she loves the country life—gardening, preserving foods, living off the land. She can't understand why some people no longer see the need to plant a garden once they qualify for food stamps.

Not having coupons for meat doesn't bother Alexander because she doesn't buy much meat. What meat she buys, she extends by making dishes such as soup, chili, and chicken pot pies. She also serves dried beans and dried peas as meat alternates, especially when the budget is tight.

"I try to stick to my weekly food stamp budget. If I give out, we eat red beans and rice one day a week," she says. "If I see a bargain on a food my family likes, I might dip into the next week's food stamps. I know



I can count on the foods I have canned or frozen if I run out of food stamps."

If participants learned just one lesson from her workshops, Alexander hopes they remember to save their change from \$1 food stamps to purchase food. When she receives such change, she places it in an envelope with her food stamps until she buys food again. If she has enough cash at the time, she pays the cents instead of breaking a \$1 food stamp.

"It's abusing the program to buy a candy bar and then spend the change for cigarettes. It makes me angry to see that," she says. "I'm trying to teach people to save the change for what it was intended."

### Offers advice on other savings

Besides tips on couponing and stretching food dollars, Alexander's second workshop covered a range of other money-saving tips—from carpooling to save on trips to the grocery store to cooking on wood-burning heaters (commonly used in Walthall County) to save on utility expenses.

And, since the second workshop coincided with the county's distribution of USDA-donated cheese, butter, and nonfat dry milk, Alexander discussed ways to use these products. She prepared one of her recipes, a cocoa mix made from nonfat dry milk, and served it to workshop attendees. As a bonus, workshop participants also received copies of the USDA publication, "Making Food Dollars Count," to help them at home in planning menus for low-cost meals.

Sharon Whitt enthusiastically supports Alexander's efforts. Her attitude: "There are changes we'd like to see in the Food Stamp Program, but we can't sit around and wait for Congress to make them. We have to help people right now make their food stamps stretch."

For more information on the workshops in Walthall County, write: Sharon Whitt, Director  
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article by Brenda Schuler  
photos by Larry Rana

# Making Food Dollars Count:

## A Food Writer's Perspective

Savvy consumers know that one of the cheapest and most readily available sources of information about food purchasing and nutrition is their local newspaper. And, according to Jean Thwaite, food writer for the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution*, consumers do take advantage of that information. On days when the Atlanta newspapers carry the weekly food section, each paper's circulation jumps by about 10,000 copies.

Thwaite, speaking to participants of USDA's "Making Food Dollars Count" workshop in Atlanta last year, stressed how newspapers can help low-income shoppers.

"Sixty-three percent of the people with incomes of \$15,000 or less read the newspaper 5 days a week," said Thwaite. "Of the people who are out of work, 64 percent read the paper 5 days a week."

### Suggests using ads and coupons

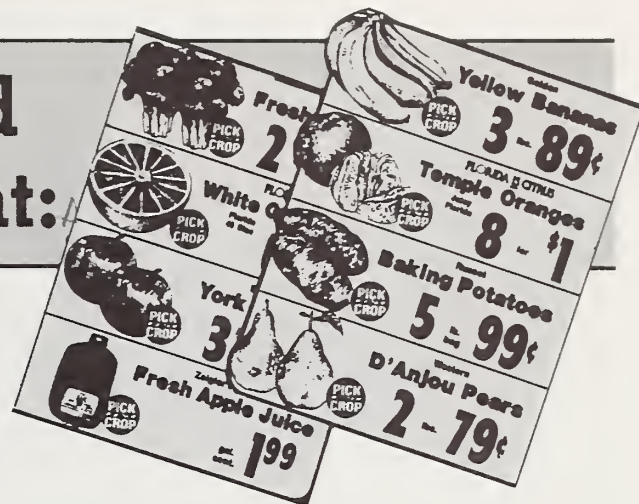
Newspapers' grocery advertisements provide the most help to low-income shoppers. By reading the ads, shoppers can determine which is the closest store with the greatest sales on food they want or need.

But, Thwaite cautioned, unadvertised specials are still sometimes the best buys. Shoppers should be alert for such specials and be flexible enough in their meal planning to take advantage of them.

"Cents-off coupons are another useful money-saving source," she said. "Approximately 73 percent of all shoppers use coupons, and 80 percent of the coupons redeemed come from newspapers."

Each Atlanta newspaper carries an average of \$10 in food coupons a week. Occasionally, the value of the coupons totals more than double that amount.

Thwaite, like all food writers, tries to offer a variety of feature articles and columns which meet the needs of most of her readers. However, readers who must stretch their food



budgets top her priority list. For example, she spends at least half a day each week compiling an article on best buys at Atlanta stores to assist shoppers with limited budgets.

"My biggest fear is that some day I'll miss the lowest price or that the stores will change their ads prior to press time," she says. Although she admits researching and writing the column is a grueling task, Thwaite considers it an essential service.

### Readers can get more help

Other consumer-oriented articles she prints routinely include "Dial a Dietitian" and "Dollar Saver."

"Dial a Dietitian," a public service of the Atlanta Dietetic Association, offers readers a chance to ask questions about food and nutrition by calling a special telephone number. Professional dietitians, who volunteer their time, return the calls with answers. A summary of each week's questions and answers appears in the *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* food sections—a regular feature of the papers for the past 15 years.

"Dollar Saver," written by Atlanta area Extension Service home economists is designed for low-income families in particular. The popular weekly column deals with wise shopping practices, planning and preparing thrifty meals, and food preservation techniques.

"What I print is not unique," says Thwaite. "There must be 50 or more food editors in the country running similar features. Our purpose is all the same—to provide information, a little fun, and most of all, something worthwhile."

article by Brenda Schuler



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